

The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC 00836-86
26 February 1986

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: John J. Bird
National Intelligence Officer for Warning

SUBJECT: Response to DCI memo of 13 January 1986: Responsibility
for Warning

1. NSA's NSOC, State's watch and operations center and CIA's Directorate of Operations watch in the Operations Center operate around the clock and as direct support of you serve better than the original National Indications Center's 24-hour watch. The National Indications Center (old NIC) became the first victim to its own success. When established in 1954, it was the only 24-hour center supporting the USIB's Watch Committee—the premier warning group of its time. By 1974, when the old NIC was disbanded, every member of the Watch Committee was served by its own center...and had been for nearly a decade or more. The NIC had no one to warn, was redundant in its 24-hour watch activity, and was thus unnecessary. This was the judgment of the USIB members then and after a test of some time seems still to be a sound one.

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3. The common and most important function for these centers is to notify principals immediately that significant change has taken place such that some action by policymakers may be urgently needed. Through the communications interconnections and good interagency working arrangements, all the major centers operate together, a single "super watch center" probably would not do better. The old NIC did worse.

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4. The monthly warning meetings and the weekly watch committee meetings service two separate but very important requirements for effective warning. The monthly meetings cross agency boundaries horizontally by providing a forum for many regional specialists to exchange views, ideally at least, in free form without the restraints of their parent agencies' previously established positions. This forum is designed to elicit minority, unpopular or alternative views held by individual specialists and provide warnings of events coming during the next thirty days and warnings of alarming longer-term trends.

5. The weekly watch committee meetings, on the other hand, provide a forum for the heads of the large analysis production organizations to exchange agency viewpoints on warning issues. As valuable as the report itself is, the role of the meeting is in sharpening subsequently published analysis or in prompting an agency production head to direct new research or a reconsideration of his agency's position.

6. The NIO for Warning is involved in both of these system processes. He is directly responsible for the quality of the warnings issued from the monthly meetings and charged with writing his own memorandum. Beyond that, the NIO for Warning and the analysts of the National Warning Staff play an advisory role by suggesting agenda items and by participating directly in the discussions during the warning meetings themselves. At least one member of the NIO for Warning's staff attends every substantive warning meeting each month. The NIO for Warning's current role in the weekly watch committee meetings is primarily advisory in the preparation of the agenda.

7. The monthly and weekly meetings have no established direct relationships but through the oversight and advisory involvement of the NIO for Warning and his staff there are several indirect linkages whereby issues raised in one forum will influence or govern those in another. Both meetings are supported by essentially the same analytical corps. In the monthly, the analysts themselves participate; in the weekly Watch Committee Meeting, their bosses. The results of both meetings are disseminated to the NIOs and the production managers closing the production loop. The major actors have the opportunity to know what is happening in each forum, but without constraining either.

8. The meetings and reports above address the slower moving issues and ensure attention is given the warning implications of the intelligence assessments. The intelligence community has nevertheless struggled with the question of how to provide warning so that it is heeded. The problem of a warning vehicle to national policymakers has plagued the Intelligence Community since before Pearl Harbor. It seems clear from the history that solutions involving periodic warning documents have always lost the force of persuasion because of their periodicity—they have become normal. Even the present report of the Watch Committee, distributed [redacted]

[redacted] seems not to be getting attention from its limited readership. [redacted]

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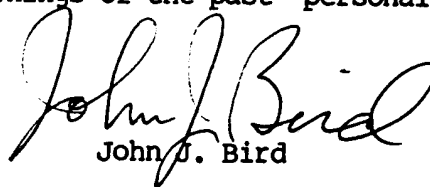
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[redacted] Experience suggests that the top-level policymakers respond better to papers specifically prepared for them, something that is different than normal and therefore at least sparks curiosity. If there is a special but not immediate warning situation that you wish to warn about, perhaps the best way would be to send a memorandum from you to the two or three principals who matter and have it delivered personally with the PDB. This procedure stands a good chance of solving the three major problems of warning: by being a special memorandum tailored to the situation, it would attract attention and gain some persuasiveness thereby; by being from you personally to them personally, it has a mark of authority; and by being written and going to more than one party, it can only be ignored at the reader's peril. You would have "rubbed the policymakers nose in it." More formal systems for warning seemed doomed to the failure of their predecessors in previous administrations. Another useful mechanism is using your weekly meetings at which you are able to verbally provide warnings and could leave memoranda recording your warning. Both of these methods, the memorandum accompanying the PDB and the personal weekly meeting should together provide you with useful warning tools and more importantly provide the ingredient missing from failed warnings of the past--personal communication.

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John J. Bird

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